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SIPDIS

BBG/NI STEWART

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SUBJECT: JOURNALISM TRAINER SAM SWAN BREAKS  
GOVERNMENT MEDIA SELF-CENSORSHIP BARRIER IN  
NORTHERN NIGERIA

Ref: State 200374

**1. SUMMARY:** Recent news reports broadcast on government-owned radio and TV channels in northern Nigeria have shown a major shift in their focus from personalities in government to community-based issues thanks to the wealth of practical journalistic and academic experience of U.S. media trainer and University of Tennessee broadcasting professor, Dr. Sam Swan. Dr. Swan teaching in two VOA-sponsored workshops in Bauchi (August 5-6) and Kano (August 7-8) has helped lay the foundation for more professional and balanced reporting. The result is the positive focus now beamed on the successful efforts of the USAID in partnership with Nigerian communities to resolve the problems with HIV/AIDS prevention, resistance to polio immunization, child survival and other health issues, education, agriculture and conflict resolution. These were issues that the workshop participants themselves identified as most important to the community and key to the survival of Nigeria democracy. See the big picture but tell the small story, as Dr. Swan advice now shaping a new kind of journalism in northern Nigeria. End Summary.

**2. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:** Public Affairs Abuja, working with BBG Sandra Stewart and Professor Sam Swan of the Department of Broadcasting, University of Tennessee organized two separate, two-day community-based reporting workshops in Bauchi August 5-6 and Kano August 7-8. CPAO Claudia Anyaso kicked off each workshop urging participants to open their minds to new ideas. As a result, 40 reporters, mostly from government-owned media organizations, including 3 community-based newspapers, received basic broadcast reporting training, which most participants described as the most vital tool acquired in their career in years. Former Director General of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Yaya Abubakar, was the Nigerian facilitator for the Bauchi workshop, while Professor Abdulrahman Adam, Chair of the Department of Mass Communication at the Bayero University played a similar role in Kano. Both Nigerian experts spoke of the need for the Nigerian media to focus their reports on community interests. At the end of the training at each venue, the participants themselves, under the supervision of Professor Sam Swan, prepared and went away with a checklist of prioritized topics of community issues they would like to report on. They were also issued certificates.

**3. JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVE:** Nigeria may have the most vibrant press in Africa, a press that endured decades of military dictatorships and helped to pave the way for the transition to democracy, but self-censorship and heavy government control of the broadcast media limits their focus. Reporting basically focuses on personalities and pro-government stories. Stories are short on facts and long on sensationalism, especially in the north. Journalists lack in-depth reporting and interviewing skills. They do not have a clear understanding of the role of the press in ensuring responsible governance. Although these

broadcast organizations are theoretically owned and financed by the public, the communities have no access to them. These workshops were intended to provide skills and attitudes that will help the press fulfill its role to the community.

14. MPP UMBRELLA THEME AND AUDIENCE REACHED: NI-PD-01 strengthening democracy. Audience was a targeted group of 40 journalists drawn from mostly government-owned broadcast stations located in 19 northern Nigerian states.

15. USG SUPPORT: Excellent. Thanks to the superb work by Sandra Stewart, Abuja would welcome an opportunity to program Dr. Swan again in the future. He is an excellent and talented broadcast teacher. Dr. Swan was well-prepared, using helpful power point tips to create the best effect in honing the skills of even the most skeptical of his 40 students. Through his style of teaching, he was able to challenge the journalists to go beyond press conferences and meetings to search for news reports that affect real people. He encouraged them to be enterprising reporters, and taught them how to develop story ideas. Most importantly, he taught them to be professional, balanced, and to reflect on issues at all levels of society, and not just government.

16. RESULT/IMPACT: Very good. Public Affairs Abuja has seen some evidence of practical application of Dr. Swan lessons in the reports done recently by some of the participants on USAID/Nigeria success stories on Polio and Education. Two news managers in Kano (City Television) and Jos (Plateau Radio and Television) have told PAS Abuja that they believe the workshop has improved the skills of their staff who participated in the program, and would want them to share their knowledge with their colleagues at work. PAS Abuja would like to recommend to the VOA a three-week U.S.-side follow-on training for 10 selected participants to further enhance their skills.

ROBERTS